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# Bullying at School: Toronto in an International Context

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BULLYING AT SCHOOL: TORONTO IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

At the request of the Toronto Board of Education, a study was undertaken of the phenomenon of bullying among elementary schcolchildren. The study has three components: a review of literature on the topic; an exploration of what Toronto schoolchildren of different ages know and understand about bullying, using a story, discussion, and sometimes role-play to elicit this information in a whole-class context; and finally, data on the incidence, correlates and frequency of bullying in a random sample of Toronto elementary schools, using questionnaires (based closely on those used in Scandinavia) to collect information from students, staff and parents.

Bullying--the tendency for some children to frequently oppress, harrass, or intimidate other children, verbally, physically or both--is familiar in many, perhaps most countries, both in and out of school. Both familial and school factors relating to bullying behaviour have been documented, and studies indicate that such behaviour patterns may be long-term and even inter-generational. In cities and countries where attempts have been made to systematically document the incidence and quality of bullying at school, a range of estimates of frequency of bullying has been reported.

By far the most complete and systematic data comes from Scandinavia, and particularly from Norway. The Scandinavian data indicate that, among students roughly the same in age as our elementary school population, about one in seven children is bullied at school more than just once or twice in a term; and that three percent of children experience bullying very frequently. British and Irish studies, which are far less comprehensive than the Scandinavian ones, suggest significantly higher rate between twenty and thirty percent. An American study of children in Grades 3 to 5 also found that about ten percent of students were identified as seriously/frequently victimized. Bullying has been a major concern in Japan also.

In the Toronto study, which involved children in 22 classrooms in 17 schools, as well as a majority of all staff members, teaching and non-teaching, and several hundred parents in those schools, rates were found that were similar to the British ones, and higher than those for Scandinavia. According to our group data, collected in classrooms from Kindergaten up, bullying at school affects children personally from Grade 2 up. The individual questionnaires, filled out by students and their teachers and parents from Grades 4 through 8, indicate that about one in five children in that grade range is victimized from time to time, and about one in twelve suffers from bullying very frequently (weekly or daily). About one child in seven admits to doing some bullying, more than once or twice a term. There are significant gender and age correlates of bullying and victimization.

There are many existing interventions, some well field-tested, which have great promise for preventing bullying at school. Some of these, such as the Peacemaker program, are already in use at some of our schools, with reportedly succesful results. The most ambitious and well-documented intervention was mounted in all Norweigan schools. Using print and audio-visual materials developed for the purpose, the program attempts to restructure the school environment to one characterized by a commitment and concern on the part of all members of the school community, regardless of age or role, to define bullying as unacceptable behaviour and to take personal responsibility for both preventing it and intervening if and when it occurs. This intervention is at the level of the whole school, and may represent a signficant change in the operational definition of what is tolerated. At the two schools *where the program was systematically evaluated, the incidence of bullying decreased by half.*

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# Chapter 1

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## Incidence of Bullying

### Scandinavia

In the early 1970's, Olweus, a Scandinavian researcher, began to study peer aggression or bullying in school children. By 1987 he had conducted numerous studies on bullying in Norway and Sweden. The main goals of the five studies were: to identify children who were bullies and victims or 'whipping boys' and to determine the mechanisms which underlie bullying and victimization. In his studies on bullying, Olweus defined a bully as: "a child who fairly often oppresses or harasses someone else; the target may be boys or girls, the harassment may be physical or mental. Bullies are usually boys although girl bullies do exist." (Olweus, 1978). The definition of victim was: 'a person who is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons." (Olweus, 1989, p. 3) Negative actions are behaviours intended to harm the victim and may be direct or indirect. Direct bullying is described as "open attacks on the victim" (Olweus, 1987, p.396) for example kicks, slaps and hitting. Indirect bullying is described as social isolation or exclusion from the group. Bullies may also frighten other students without physical or verbal contact (e.g. making dirty faces).

Olweus collected information from several different sources using different data collection techniques. Information was collected by means of teacher assessments, peer ratings, intensive parent interviews, and projective tests for children, covering: (a) factors in the school setting which were responsible for creating and maintaining bullying behaviours in children (e.g. the size of the school, the size of the class, peer relations in the class, teacher attitude toward teaching), (b) physical characteristics of children that may cause them to become bullies or victims (e.g., strength, weight, height), (c) psychological and behavioural characteristics that may pertain to bullies and victims, (d) socioeconomic status of the family, (e) parents' child rearing methods, and (f) the stability of children's aggression over time.

Olweus' conclusions with regard to physical and psychological characteristics of victims and bullies, socioeconomic status of the family, child-rearing methods and the stability of aggression will be discussed later in this review. Even though the numbers of bullies and victims in Olweus' early studies were substantial, it was not until 1982 that concern for victims was aroused on a national scale, in Norway. In 1982, three Norwegian boys aged 10-14 committed suicide, most likely due to severe bullying by peers. In response to these suicidal deaths, the Norwegian Ministry of Education began a nationwide campaign against bully/victim problems in its comprehensive schools (grades 1-9) in the fall of 1983. At that time, Olweus was asked to document the incidence of bullying nationwide, in Norway. At about the same time, he collected similar data on Swedish students, grades 3 to 9, in three communities.

All Norwegian primary and junior schools were invited to take part in the intervention and approximately 85% of the schools agreed to participate. Valid data was obtained from 715 schools with approximately 130,000 students. Children from eight to sixteen years of age participated in the

study. The data revealed: the number of bullies and victims in the different schools, the number of male and female bullies and victims, and the kinds of strategies that are used to deal with bullying.

Based on the baseline results of the Inventory, 15% (83,000) or one out of seven children in Norwegian schools were found to be involved in bullying "now and then" or more frequently. About nine percent of the students were classified as victims while six percent were found to be bullies. Swedish figures were sufficiently similar that Olweus uses the same basic statistics to describe incidence of bullying in both countries.

In a longitudinal study of bullying in Bergen, Norway, teachers were asked to select children in their classes whom they thought were bullies and victims. The children that the teachers identified were the same children who reported that they had been victimized or were bullies on the Bully Inventory, thus confirming the validity of the measure.

Boys are bullied more than are girls, particularly in junior high school. A larger number of girls were bullied by indirect means ( threatening and social isolation) as opposed to physical means. (e.g. hitting and kicking.) An equal number of boys were bullied by indirect means but more were physically bullied as compared to girls. The percentage of victims (children being bullied) decreased with age, but the percent of bullies increases with age for boys and decreases with age for girls.

Olweus aggregates the results of his several studies encompassing more than 150,000 students in Norway and Sweden. He concludes that the percentage of victims in the population is 9 to 10% and the percentages of bullies is 7 to 8%.

Another group of Scandinavian researchers, Bjorkqvist, Ekman & Lagerspetz (1982), studied bullies' and victims' self-perceptions and their views of social norms. Bullies and victims were selected based on peer ratings. Out of a total of 430 students aged 14-16, 10% were rated as either bullies or victims. The results indicated that the bullies considered themselves to be dominant, impulsive and lacking self-control. Victims thought that they were depressed, unattractive, and unintelligent and inferior.

**United Kingdom and Ireland**

Yates and Smith (no date) carried out a study on bullying with approximately 1600 13- and 15-year-old students in two schools in Britain. The Questionnaires used were Olweus' Bully Questionnaires with some minor changes in accordance with British context and word usage. The results indicated that 22% of the students reported being bullied "now and then" or more often. At school A, a larger number of girls indicated that they had been bullied, while at school B, more boys reported being bullied. Younger children were bullied more often than older children. Nine percent of the children reported that they had bullied others "now and then" or more frequently.

Stephenson and Smith (1987) conducted a research study on bullying in 26 schools in Northeast England. Information was collected from 49 teachers on 1078 final year primary school children. Teachers indicated that 23% of the children were involved in bullying as either the bullies or victims. Seven percent of the children were identified as victims, ten percent were bullies and six percent were bully/victims, children who both bullied others and were bullied. Many of the cases of bullying had been ongoing for at least one year. Even though almost one quarter of the children in the sample were involved in bullying, 91% of teachers described the bullying problem in their class as 'minor'.

Walshe (1989) reports that 20% of the children in Dublin's primary schools are afraid of going to school because of bullying.

**Japan**

In a 1985 survey conducted by the National Police Agency, the number of criminal cases resulting from bullying or 'Ijime' was 531. A total of 1920 boys and girls were arrested and seven girls and boys killed themselves in 1984 in bullying-related cases. Data from several surveys have indicated that children in Japan involved in bullying: (1) bully a specific person or group, (2) use forms of bullying which are indirect such as active isolation or rejection, (3) bully repeatedly over the long term, (4) have no regard for other's feelings, (5) bully to release frustration, (6) are also bullied and (7) see bullying as a game.

Kikkawa (1987) conducted a survey of teachers' opinions on bullying in Tokyo. Eighty-five guidance teachers from private junior and senior high schools in Tokyo Metropolis participated. The definition of bullying used in this study was: "aggressive behaviour which occurs in most cases on the personal relations among bullies, victims and bystanders in formal or informal social groups". (p. 26.) Kikkawa defines bullies as "children who are in an advantageous position and do mental or physical damage to victims intentionally and one-sidedly." (p. 26.) Victims are children who are in a disadvantageous position in the peer group or in the class and are, one-sidedly, mentally damaged or physically injured by the bullies." (p. 26.) Bullying may take the form of quarreling or physical fighting.

The topics covered in Kikkawa's survey were: (1) the presence of school violence, (2) teacher's treatment of this violence, (3) the causes of bullying. The data from the survey revealed that bullying occurred in 76.5% of the schools. The mean number of occurrences was 5.5 cases per school year. Bullying wasn't usually noticed by teachers because they had difficulty distinguishing bullying from play fighting. Teachers became aware of bullying through friends of the victim or other students, physical signs on the victim, parental complaints, complaints of victims' other teachers, and damage to the victim's belongings. Teachers indicated that in response to a bullying incident they would: (a) talk to the victim and bully, (b) present the bullying case at a teachers' meeting, (c) make contact with the head of the guidance department, (d) give encouragement to the bullied student, (e) discuss the bullying problem with all class members and (f) reconcile the students involved. Teachers felt that bullying should be handled as a school problem. They indicated that several factors in the school environment were responsible for bullying, including: poor relations between teachers and students; not enough cooperation among teachers; and teachers' practice of judging children on their achievements alone. Teachers also felt that bullying was caused by poor upbringing and a lack of community feeling.

According to Greenbaum (1988) "Bullying is considered a major problem in Japan... "This violence is one reason why major educational reform has been called for." "It may be that the pressure to conform in Japan may cause children who are only slightly different to be bullied" (p. 6). In Japan, a 22 million yen lawsuit has been filed against the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the parents of two boys who are being accused of bullying a 13 year old child who committed suicide. According to the Times Educational Supplement, Ijime was responsible for at least nine students' suicides in 1985 and for cases in which victims murdered bullies.

**China**

Ekblad and Olweus (1986) used a measure of aggression and aggression control developed by Olweus. (This was not the same inventory used in Scandinavia, and does not yield estimates of percent of children who are bullies and victims.) Children with negative attitudes toward school tended to be more aggressive in general than other children. Boys were more aggressive than girls, and among boys general aggression was slightly related to negative relations with parents. For the most part however, Chinese school children were friendly, well-behaved, ambitious and tried to control aggressive behaviour. The authors suggest that their findings "agree well with what can be expected on the basis of the general discouragement of aggressive behavior in children, the emphasis on

harmonious social order, and the encouragement of prosocial behavior that are characteristic of Chinese socialization . . . ." (p.322)

**United States**

Franklin (1989) conducted a study of peer aggression among 11,000 junior high and high school students. Almost half of the boys and more than a quarter of the girls indicated that they had taken part in a fist fight or a fight involving weapons in the previous year. As well, 14% of the children had been robbed, 13% had been assaulted on a bus, and more than a quarter had been threatened.

Perry, Kusel and Perry (1988) conducted a study with third, fourth and fifth grade students to examine peer victimization in children. Children were asked if they bullied their peers, to name classmates who engage in verbal and physical victimization and to indicate the children in their class with whom they would or would not want to play. Teachers were asked to nominate children who were bullies. The results indicated the 10% of the sample were severely victimized by peers. Verbal victimization was greater than physical victimization. With increases in age, verbal victimization remained the same but physical victimization seemed to drop off.

According to Greenbaum (1988) bullying affects school attendance and school safety. A 1984 study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals demonstrated that 25% of the students in the least violent schools reported that being bullied was one of their greatest concerns. If children fear coming to school and are not comfortable in school once they arrive, they will be unable to devote their attention to learning. Greenbaum (1987) notes that: "Fear has become so much a part of the everyday lives of victims that they must adopt fugitive-like routines to avoid areas of the campus where their adversaries hang out: playgrounds, bathrooms, locker areas, hallways, or "unsafe turf". (p. 22.) Some children pretend that they are sick or may actually become sick because of the stress associated with being bullied.

St. John-Brooks (1984) comments that it is difficult to determine the size of the bullying problem because children are afraid to report that they have been bullied. She notes that bullying comes to teachers' attention when children do not show up for school.

Reid (1989) states that there is a cycle of truancy for victims. This cycle begins when children are victimized and decide not to go to school. When they return to school, they are bullied to a greater degree and may even be verbally victimized by teachers for not having attended school. There are consequences not only for victims and bullies but also for children who witness bullying. These children may become anxious, especially if they are friendly with the bully and are expected to take part in the bullying. They may also feel that they will be bullied next. Alternatively, children who witness bullying incidents may learn that bullying is fun and begin to bully other children.

## Characteristics of Victims and Bullies

Olweus (1988) described the characteristics of bullies and victims. He noted that the children who bullied had slightly lower grades and concentration in class, and below average personal hygiene. In addition these children were not well liked by their peers or by staff and were more likely to have family problems.

Olweus found that bullies were no more insecure or unhappy than the average child but that they were larger, stronger, active, confident and assertive and had a positive attitude toward violence. Bullies' academic performance was found to be only slightly below that of other students. Children from affluent families tended to bully others as often as did children from poor families. Bullies tended to be

impulsive and have strong needs to dominate other students and did not have any empathy for their victims.

Victims were found to be physically weaker than other children and had lower self-esteem. Victims were passive and tended to avoid situations in which they may have to fight. They were anxious, insecure, cautious, sensitive, quiet, and saw themselves as failures. Victims had a hard time asserting themselves within their peer group, had closer relationships with their families, particulary their mothers, and tended to be overprotected.

According to Batsche (1989) victims demonstrate to other children that they are insecure and feel worthless. Floyd (1985) states that victims are not chosen at random: "They (victims) frequently come within the vision of aggressors as potential targets because they behave in ways that comply with the aggressor's needs and motives." (p. 10.) A victim's passivity and vulnerability may be threatening to bullies.

Tattum & Lane (1989) indicated that one reason for bullying is that victims are different than other children in some way. Tattum & Lane made the following comments about bullying: "At its most insidious it focuses on vulnerable children who are regarded as being different because of ethnic origins, homosexual inclinations, or physical or mental disabilities." (p. 7, 1990). Victims have difficulty in asserting themselves among their peers and this lack of ability to be assertive may be the cause of their victimization (Olweus, 1988). Olweus also states that victims may be teased by their peers as a result of their parents' over-protectiveness.

There was also a group of children who were both victims and bullies These children were least popular with peers. they provoked other children and were themselves easily provoked.

Perry et al. (1988) used a peer nomination inventory with 165 children in grades three four, five and six to examine peer aggression. Children were asked to name classmates who engage in verbal and physical victimization. Children were also asked to circle the names of three children in their class whom they would like to work or play with the most and the least. Peer acceptance and rejection scores were calculated based on these data. Victimization was also assessed using teacher nomination and self-ratings from children. According to the results of the study, peer rejection was related to aggression and victimization, meaning that children who were bullies and victims were more likely to be rejected by their classmates than other children.

## Causes of Bullying and Victimization

According to Batsche (1989), in a descriptive summary statement on behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists, bullying behaviour is the result of environmental influences; school, home and the peer group. He notes the following reasons for children becoming bullies: (a) too little supervision, (b) positive outcomes associated with bullying, (c) observing aggressive behaviour in the home, (d) harsh physical punishment, (e) a peer group that is not opposed to aggressive behaviour, (f) a poor self concept and (g) the expectation of hostility; because bullies may have a poor self-concept, they expect others to treat them poorly. [Note that (f) and (g) are contradicted by Olweus's finding that bullies are not characterized by low self-esteem.]

### School Factors

The amount of bullying in a school is not only dependent on the mechanisms which stimulate this sort of behaviour but also on forces that attempt to control it. (Olweus, 1987.) " The attitudes, routines, and behaviours of the school personnel , in particular the teachers, are certainly decisive factors in

preventing and controlling bullying activities . . . This generalization is supported, for example, by the clear negative correlation between teacher density during recess and amount of bully/victim problems . . . And in a situation where bullying problems already exist, it is obvious that the reactions of students who do not participate in bullying can have a major influence . . . " (Olweus, 1987a, p. 411) The following are factors which tend to encourage bullying in schools: (1)no clear rules about dealing with aggression;(2)classes with a large number of students;(3)little principal involvement with the students;(4) poor cohesiveness of the teaching staff and the principal; (5) lack of involvement of teachers and students in decision-making.

Olweus's analysis of data from over 400 boys in grades 6 through 9 gave no support for the hypothesis that aggression is a direct result of competition and striving for grades in school.

Several Scandinavian studies strongly indicate that school and average class size are not related to the frequency or level of bullying problems in school. (Nor is urban size: no differences were found between rural and urban schools, in rate of bullying; even in one-room schoolhouses, the rate was no different.)

**Family Factors**

Olweus (1987) indicated that the following four factors may lead children to develop an antisocial behaviour pattern: (1) parents' lack of warmth and involvement, (2) a lack of limits on aggressive behaviour, (3) harsh and inconsistent punishment, and (4) the child's temperament.

McCord (1986) conducted a longitudinal study of 253 boys who participated in a treatment program for juvenile delinquents. A counsellor was assigned to each boy and conducted bi-monthly visits between 1939 and 1945. Counsellors described in detail the interactions between the boys and their parents. These reports provide a picture of the lives of the families that they visited. The follow-up of the 253 boys began in 1975 when the boys had reached middle age. Court records were examined for each of the men. Men who had been convicted of larceny, auto theft, burglary, assault, attempted rape, rape, attempted murder, kidnapping or murder were given the label of 'criminal' in this study. The results of the study indicated that parents of boys who became criminals were not affectionate, were too permissive and were more likely to be aggressive. Parental conflict and a lack of consistency in discipline were also factors related to later criminal behaviour. Mothers of criminals tended to have little self-confidence and fathers seemed to have little respect for their wives. According to McCord: "...these results show that child rearing does have a long-term impact on antisocial aggression." (p. 355).

Eron et al. (1987) found that the aggressive behaviour of boys at age eight was related to aggression at age eighteen and to the method of discipline used with children at age 30. Eron et al. interviewed 827 eight year old boys and their parents and used a peer rating technique to measure child aggression. The original subjects were reinterviewed ten and twenty-two years later. Twenty-two years later, 295 of the original subjects and their spouses were reinterviewed and data was obtained from motor vehicle, criminal and mental health records. For subjects with children, a description of the subject's disciplinary techniques was requested and children were asked to indicate their own level of aggression. The results of the study indicated that aggression is stable over time and is transmitted from parent to child. There was a positive relationship between boys' aggression at age eight and the severity of punishment that they received from their parents, meaning that children who were harshly punished tended to be more aggressive than other children. There was also a positive relationship between earlier peer rated aggression and the severity with which subjects punished their own children indicating that children who are aggressive tend to grow up and use harsh disciplinary techniques with their own children. " By the time the child is eight years old, characteristic ways of behaving aggressively or non- aggressively have already been established. Aggression as a problem-solving behaviour is learned very early in life, and it is learned very well; the payoff is tremendous. The

inducement to change must be made equally attractive." (p. 261). A recent review article (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989) concludes that there is strong evidence for the stability of aggressive tendencies over time, from childhood to adulthood, as well as intergenerationally, in families. The authors stress the importance of intervention with children and families as early as possible.

Olweus (1977a) conducted a longitudinal study looking at the stability of aggression in males over time. Two hundred and one boys from grade 6 classes in Solna, Sweden were rated by peers on four scale items when in grade 6 and three years later when in grade 9. The four items were: the tendency to engage in unprovoked physical aggression against peers, the tendency to be a target of peer aggression, the tendency to protest as a result of being criticized by a teacher, and popularity among peers. For example, peer raters were asked to indicate if the other boys in their class had ever started fights with boys in their school. Boys were rated after grade six and after grade nine, three years later. The results indicated that aggression in boys appeared to be consistent over time.

**Racism**

Racism often takes the form of bullying in schools (Besag, 1989). The most commonly used bullying technique is name calling. Akhtar and Stronach (1986) state that verbal abuse of non-white children in Norwich, England begins in first school and occurs more frequently in middle school. A common approach to dealing with racial bullying is to ask children to be tolerant of cultural and racial differences. However, this approach usually serves to move the location of bullying from the classroom and schoolyard to the streets.

Cohn (1987) carried out a study in three primary and three secondary schools in outer London. A questionnaire was completed by 549 students concerning their experiences with name-calling. The results of the study revealed that racist name-calling increases with age and that boys are able to list more racist names as compared to girls. Of the children in the 13-17 year old age category, 53% indicated that they had been called racist names, 34% mentioned sexist names, 26% were called names relating to parts of their bodies, and 16% were called names referring to their intelligence. Most of the twenty teachers who completed the questionnaire thought that name calling was a serious problem and could have serious negative effects. Cohn suggests that a solution to racial name-calling may involve examining how pupils regard and refer to other pupils. A policy relating to appropriate relationships between pupils may be effective.

**Social Isolation and Secrecy**

St. John-Brooks (1984) stated that the reason that the amount of bullying is difficult to determine is that the victims refuse to tell anyone that they have been bullied:

> And that's still one of the problems in investigating bullying - whether ritual or random... It's surrounded by a mixture of secrecy and exaggeration so it's almost impossible to tell exactly how much goes on. (p. 363).

Children are afraid that if they tell parents or teachers about bullying the bully will retaliate against them.

## Interventions

### The Scandinavian Model

The most widely known intervention for bullying is the one used by Olweus. The main goals of the program were to reduce the incidence and prevalence of bullying in schools. The sub-goals of the program were:

1. to increase knowledge and awareness of the problem including dispelling myths about bullying. A Bully Inventory was designed by Olweus to collect current information about the status of the bullying problem in particular schools.

2. to actively involve teachers and parents. Adults are encouraged to take responsibility for children's behaviour at school. Teachers are asked to intervene in bullying situations, to demonstrate that bullying is not allowed in school and to have discussions with victims, bullies and their parents. Consistency in these approaches is important.

3. to develop clear rules against bullying behaviour and to provide protection and support for victims. Students and teachers may develop rules and sanctions for bullying in their classes.

In order to educate teachers and parents about bullying, a 32 page booklet, describing bullying and solutions to bullying was distributed to all comprehensive schools in Norway. A four page folder with descriptions of bullying incidents and advice to parents of victims and bullies was sent to parents. A videocassette depicting bullying incidents and a short inventory to be used as a baseline measure in schools in which Olweus' intervention program would be conducted were also developed. This inventory contains questions on the nature and incidence of bullying problems in the school and teachers' willingness to intervene.

The program was based on objectives which may help to restructure the school environment "(1) to create a school environment characterized by warmth, positive interest, and involvement with adults, (2) to set firm limits on unacceptable behaviour, (3) to apply sanctions consistently, and (4) to have adults act as authority figures in some respects."(Olweus, 1988, p. 20)

An evaluation of the intervention program was conducted with 2500 male and female students from 112 grade 4-7 classes in two primary and junior high schools in Bergen. There were marked differences in bullying behaviour at eight months and twenty months after the program was instituted. This effect was seen for boys and girls. Peer ratings of the number of students in their class who are bullied or bullied others had decreased. The number of students reporting that they were bullied or bullied others "now and then" or more frequently was reduced by 50%. In addition, there was a reduction in general anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, theft or truancy. Also, there was an increase in satisfaction with school as was evidenced in more children reporting that they liked recess.

### Other models

Other interventions have also been proposed. These others are mainly theoretical and in most cases their effectiveness has not been systematically evaluated. The final part of this literature review will involve a description of these interventions.

St. John Brooks (1984) mentions a school in North London where the head teacher is attempting to decrease bullying among students by encouraging victims to to tell someone that they have been bullied. When new children enter the school, they are told: "You have a right to come to school without

being afraid. This is a telling school. The rule that you must not tell was invented by bullies, and you will only get into trouble if you don't tell". (p. 365.) The head promises children that they will not be harmed outside of school and he accompanies children to their homes if necessary.

Floyd (1985) emphasizes that teachers should encourage behaviours and attitudes that are incompatible with bullying. He proposes a program called the "Winning Ticket", an incentive system for helping students control aggressive behaviors. Each child is scored on ten social skills for each period to a maximum of 100 for the day and must bring back his/her winning ticket signed by his/her parent the following day. Another strategy for decreasing classroom aggression according to Floyd is to encourage teamwork. For example, a teacher may divide his/her class into teams of four. Each team then chooses a name and is given an assignment which requires a group effort. Rewards are given to the team in which all members are cooperating with one another. Using this strategy, strong team players will encourage weaker players to do their best so that their team will win.

In London, England a play entitled 'Only Playing, Miss' (Casdagli, 1989) deals with the issue of classroom aggression. The play, a story about a boy named Eugene who has missed several weeks of school because of his father's death, is performed for audiences in secondary schools. When Eugene returns to school, his friends hold a mock trial and sentence him to cruel punishment. A teacher finally intervenes and holds a meeting with the bullies and their parents. The play increases children's awareness of bullying and demonstrates that there are ways to deal with bullying behaviour.

Stead (1990) reports on an innovative method that British schools have used to control bullying. "Bully courts" have been set up in schools to make bullies aware of their impact on other children and of the consequences of their actions. So far, courts have been set up in thirty schools mostly near London with students aged 7-16. The courts meet once a week and are made up of an advisor and four students. The four students read descriptions of the event presented by the bully and the victim. They then hold a hearing to get more details about the case. The punishments for bullies vary. Bullies may be ordered to stay after school or to eat lunch in an isolated area.

Tattum & Lane (1989) discuss a whole curriculum approach to bullying. According to Tattum & Lane "the caring ethos must be made explicit through the curriculum and the daily dealings of individuals". (p. 76.) For example, timetables are arranged so that the bullies and victims are in the same classes. The children may be asked to work in groups on a novel concerning bullying from the victim's point of view. The groups are asked to discuss the book in terms of their own personal experiences and to discuss ways to deal with bullying.

Greenbaum (1989) underscores the need to educate the public about bullying. He states that myths about bullying must be abandoned. (e.g. bullying is just part of 'growing up'.) As well, he notes that the solution to bullying is not to tell the victim to fight back. Greenbaum (1989) also discusses prevention and intervention strategies. He notes that action can be taken by educators, parents and students. According to Greenbaum educators can:

- use a questionnaire to determine the scope of the problem
- communicate clear and consistently-enforced behaviour standards
- monitor playgrounds closely
- establish a recording system for incidents of bullying
- provide children with opportunities to discuss bullying
- never overlook intentionally abusive acts
- contact parents of both bullies and victims about the problem
- establish intervention programs (e.g. suspension, counseling)
- encourage parent participation in school activities
- provide support and protection for victims

Rules against bullying other children in school may include the following points:

- o hitting another student is a criminal act
- o every student has the right to feel safe in his/her school
- o any child bringing arms to the school will be considered dangerous and the police will be called
- o vandalism and other violations of the law will be treated as such

Greenbaum delineates what parents can do to help decrease bullying:

- o watch for symptoms of bullying
- o encourage children to talk about bullying incidents
- o inform school officials if a child is being bullied
- o do not use overly harsh disciplinary techniques
- o ask for a copy of the school rules
- o spend quality time with children

At some schools in Toronto, a program for coping with incidents of bullying has been designed (Landsberg, 1990). The program called 'Peacemaking' is administered by the students and has become an important part of the curriculum. The Peacemaking program is based on a similar program developed in California in a tough, inner-city school. The bully and victim choose a 'Peacemaker' to help them solve their dispute. The peacemaker then finds a partner. The bully and victim are asked if they'd like to solve the problem themselves or if they'd like a teacher to help them solve the problem. The peacemaker then runs through a list of rules and waits until everyone agrees to them. These rules are: No touching. No arguing. No interrupting. No plugging of ears. No running away. No name calling. Tell the truth. After the peacemaker lists all of the rules, he/she asks if anyone has anything else to say or if anyone has any solutions. Each child is given the opportunity to tell his/her side of the story. As a result of the program, guilt and blame seem to vanish. The peacemaking program is effective because it allows children to take responsibility for settling disputes.

Batsche (1989) states that a strong commitment from parents is important in dealing with bullying. Parent training and social skills training for children are also important. Social skills training can be given at school and can be reinforced in the home by proper supervision, modeling, rewards and discipline. A strong value system must be developed in the home and school that teaches that bullying as unacceptable. Cooperative learning, peer tutoring and other group learning opportunities should be encouraged. Punishment for bullying should involve apologizing to the victim, the demonstration of correct behaviour and the provision of assistance to younger, more helpless children.

An example of a social skills training program targeted at aggressive children is the "Anger Coping Program" (Lochman, Lampron, Gemmer & Harris, 1987).

Patterson et al (1989) review the literature on antisocial behaviour in children and suggest that "successful intervention appears to be possible for preadolescents, with parent-training interventions showing the most favorable outcomes . . . . Parent training refers to procedures in which parents are given specific instructions in ways to improve family management practices . . . the parent-training programs have been evaluated in a number of random assignment evaluation studies including follow-up designs (six-month to four-year intervals). In general, the findings support the hypothesis that parent training is effective when applied to younger antisocial children." (p.333).

Besag (1989) states that schools can be very instrumental in reducing bullying behaviour: (1) She notes that schools should develop policies to decrease bullying, and that these policies should be made known to children, parents, teachers, administrators, etc. The lack of a school policy on bullying gives children the message that bullying is acceptable. According to Besag: "The most effective preventative measure a school can employ is perhaps for all staff members and the Local Education

Authority to establish clearly that bullying in school, in any form, will not be tolerated and, indeed will be dealt with firmly". (p. 103) (2) The school should be viewed as a community in which each person is responsible for the well-being of others. A school identity or 'ethos' should be developed with distinctive values, goals, attitudes and procedures. A whole school approach should be taken rather than blaming a handful of children for bullying. (3) Supervision of children should be increased so that they are not left unattended at breaks or when changing classes. Teachers should arrive at their classes on time and should arrange for a replacement teacher if they will be leaving the classroom. Additional supervision should be added at bus queues, on buses, in changing rooms and other areas. Also, features may be built into schools that may decrease bullying such as well-lit hallways, windows and mirrors so that children can be supervised more easily. The architectural design of schools should be 'open-concept' so that bullying will be easier to spot. (4) Children who are bored may bully other children. The curriculum should be interesting for students and should provide opportunities for self-development.

Besag suggests ways in which teachers can help to protect children from bullying. Teachers should try to integrate the victim slowly into his/her peer group. Teachers may select an older pupil to act as a 'big brother' who accompanies the victim throughout the day and acts as a companion and body guard. A program may be developed to bring the victims together for support and guidance. Support groups may involve experimentation with safe social settings, practicing of skills and techniques to improve self-image, confidence and self-esteem. Protection of victims may also be achieved by altering the behaviour of the bully. A program for bullies may be developed which: (a) makes bullies aware of the consequences of their actions, (b) makes bullies aware that verbal taunts or ostracism also constitute bullying, (c) lets bullies know that after they bully another child, others may still taunt him/her, (d) helps bullies improve their poor self-image, and (e) helps bullies distinguish between leadership and dominance.

Teachers may also want to assign an older child of the same sex who does not bully other children to act as a role model for the bully.

**In summary**, the literature on bullying at school suggests that the phenomenon is widespread, that incidence varies by culture and nationality, and that effective intervention is a real possibility.

# Chapter 2

# BULLYING IN TORONTO SCHOOLS: GROUP DATA

## Classroom Data

The discussion of the current research in Toronto is divided into two parts, conforming to the two methods used of collecting data from students. In the first part (A), the results will be reported for the group level information obtained from students from all 22 classrooms involved in classroom discussions following the story reading. In the second (and longer) part (B), results will be reported for the individual level data obtained from individual students'and their teachers in 14 Grade 4 through 8 classrooms; as well as for parents'from the 22 classrooms; and for other teaching and non-teaching staff in the 17 schools.

Children's concepts, experience and attitudes around bullying were investigated in an open-ended manner at the group level through a story-reading, and discussion/role-play exercise, in which the story and discussion theme was bullying. Two books were chosen which describe the experience of school-based bullying. One, involving a little boy, of kindergarten or early primary age, being shoved out of his chosen seat on the school bus, morning after morning, by a rough-spoken big boy was read to six classes of children, from junior kindergarten to Grade 3. For older children, in Grades 4 through 8, the book chosen was one in which the victim was a young adolescent boy being bullied by a group of his peers in the schoolyard. Both readings and discussions were led by experienced teacher/readers, and children were then encouraged to participate in a discussion of the story, what it means, and how it relates to their own experience. Teacher/readers (there were three in all) tried to cover six questions, in an informal way, with each group.

Extensive notes made during the discussion periods by a skilled observer/recorder were analyzed in terms of these six questions, as well as for other themes which might emerge. The questions and the responses are shown below.

1. **Do students know what bullying means?**

   Only a few kindergarten children used the word "bullying" to describe the behaviour in the story. Most understood what it was, but assumed the referent was only physical aggression. A minority understood name-calling and other verbal taunting as abuse. They were very clear that such behaviour as they identified as bullying was negative and undesirable.

   By Grades 1 to 3 all the students knew the term and applied it immediately to the situation in the story. They saw physical aggression and verbal taunting as part of the same kind of behaviour. With age, the definition of bullying broadens. By Grades 5 and 6, students used it to include threatening and excluding, in addition to verbal taunting and physical aggression. Excluding was identified by students as a problem in schools which served more affluent areas of the city. Students generally expressed strong disapproval of bullying.

2. **Is there bullying at school?**

Most kindergarten children had not seen bullying at their school. (They tend to have a separate playground from the rest of the school.) By Grade 1-3 a substantial minority of students said there was bullying in their schoolyard, and by Grade 4 a majority said so. It was always spoken of in terms of bigger students picking on younger ones.

The bullies were variously identified as Grade 6 students in K-6 schools) or as Grade 7/8 students (in K-8 schools, or where an adjoining senior school shares the yard). Most children said they felt safe in the school, except for one Grade 6 class in a K-8 school, where several students said they felt unsafe in the washrooms and in the basement.

Only at the Grade 5/6 level did students identify their own classmates as among the bullies. At Grade 8, however, although students all said it happened all over the school, these students did not identify their peers as bullies. In fact, it was observed that in the three Grade 8 classes, students appeared to work together more harmoniously and respectfully than was typically true at the Grade 5/6 level.

3. **Is there bullying outside school?**

Kindergarten children's experience of bullying, if they had any, tended to involve older siblings at home. Some gave examples of being involved as victims when playing on the street. The latter was true in Grades 1-3 as well, where a few mentioned anxiety about gangs. This was expressed more by the older students, who talked of fears of gangs, swarmings,downtown areas,and drug-related gangs. These fears of a more violent form of bullying, involving theft, grew more pronounced with age. The bullies, in these stories, were often seen as older adolescents, or peers from other schools. Some Grade 8 students expressed fear about bullying and violence that might threaten them when they are in secondary school.

4. **What is students' experience of bullying?**

Kindergarten children mainly identify bullying only as happening among siblings. They recognize that older students sometimes pick on younger ones at school, but do not recognize bullying among peers, although some of their teachers spoke of peer bullying amongst their students.The children's understanding of bullies is mainly as "bad" and "not nice". When asked why they thought people bullied they imagined it was mainly "to take stuff."

By Grades 1 to 3, a substantial minority say they have been bullied at school. Bullies are those who "do bad stuff" and who "like fighting." Sometimes they "want you to do their homework" or "want your lunch." The only bullying they confess to doing is with siblings.

In Grades 4 to 8, several students talked about "new kids" being victims, including themselves in their first days at school, particularly if they had started school at other than the regular times for changing school. They also talked about some students "getting picked on a lot" because "they're scared and won't tell" or won't fight back. They talked about feeling scared and threatened. This anxiety was voiced especially by Grade 4-6 students about students from neighbouring or adjoining senior schools. They no longer thought just being bigger explained bullying: some said it was because the bullies were showing off and wanting to be seen as powerful; others thought that the bullies themselves had been victims, or were in trouble at school, and jealous of those who do well.

Grade 8 students were clear about what it felt like to be a victim. It was obvious that most of them had had some direct experience, but found it embarrassing to talk about.

Where younger children felt simply angry or upset at being victimized, these older children spoke of feeling "crushed", "lonely" and "ashamed." They said they felt powerless.

Only in the Grade 5/ 6 classes where these students were the most senior in the school did some students say it is fun to bully.They spoke of the victims as "wimps", "nerds", "weak" and "afraid to fight back." Some thought being tough made them popular. In the Grade 8 classes, however, students saw the bullies as troubled--angry, "losers," trying to feel powerful at others' expense. One class developed an image of the bully through role-play as the product of a violent and neglectful home, where he had experienced violence directed against him, and had internalized the response. This kind of attempt to understand the origins of antisocial behaviour instead of only describing or condemning it was an adult-like response not observed in younger children.

5. **What can be done about bullying?**

Kindergarten children felt that the only protection is adult intervention; to fight back is to get hurt. A few felt" telling" might get them in trouble, and it would be better to just walk away. Some thought "talking nicely" to the bully might help.

By Grades 1 to 4, children felt adults should intervene more. Parents should be contacted, and teachers should take it seriously. Teachers should be more active and consistent in preventing or stopping bullying, especially on the playground. Boys began to differ from girls in suggesting both physical and verbal retaliation. Girls suggested avoidance, and friends helping each other. Many agreed that bullies need help. although some thought punishment would work.

By Grade 6 the general reaction was that bullying can't be stopped.This view was put forward most loudly by those students who said they found bullying fun. Advice to the potential victims includes: not to be alone, stay away from bullies, and try to "buddy-up" with others.

The Grade 8s suggested two strategies: not being a loner, because it's safer to have friends and be part of a group; or, to keep away and avoid bullies. These students also thought "the school should work with bullies." They saw the problem as residing in the bullies, not the victims, and felt school psychologists and family counsellors were needed to break family cycles of violence.

Students from Special Education classes appear to have more experience of being bullied than other children. This is reflected in the way both students in both the junior and senior classes closely identified with the victims of bullying in the stories read, in the discussion that followed the reading. Junior students said bullying made them feel "unwanted" and "not part of what's going on." Senior students saw the victims as "unhappy kids" who were "embarrassed" by their victimization. The junior students wanted the schools to work harder to prevent bullying, while the senior students were more pessimistic, seeing adult or school intervention as ineffectual and inconsistent.

6. **Are race or gender issues involved in bullying?**

In kindergarten to Grade 3, children did not identify race as an issue. As for gender, they thought both boys and girls could be bullies, but that boys do it more. Boys' bullying was seen as more often physical, and girls' verbal.

In Grades 4 to 6 cultural differences were mentioned as a factor in the bullying of "new" students. Immigrants were sometimes targets. One boy said he was frequently called racial names by older students from the nearby school. Bullying was seen mainly as a same sex activity, for both sexes, with boys' bullying being more frequent and more serious.

In Grade 8, students said there was definitely racist bullying, and mentioned Blacks and Vietnamese as target groups. They strongly disapproved of this behaviour. Like the younger students, they felt boys and girls were both capable of bullying, but that boys were the more persistent and violent offenders.

## Summary of Group Data

The general picture that emerges is one in which the youngest children do not use the word bullying, but have a concept of older students picking on younger ones, though their own experience of it is mainly limited to home and siblings.

By Grade 1 or 2 children are clear about the concept, and many have witnessed it, if not experienced it.

As children grow older, bullying becomes more and more familiar to them. Most do not identify themselves as victims, but a substantial minority do. By Grade 8, however, most children indicate they have experienced bullying at some time or other. Very few identify themselves as bullies, but a few do by Grade 5, and some children are quite hardened in their unapologetic identification as bullies by Grade 6.

By Grade 4 the understanding of bullies has progressed from "bad" children to children who have been ill-treated, and are angry or depressed. But it is not until Grade 6 that children seem to give up on the idea that bullying can be stopped, mostly by relying on adults to intervene.

From Grade 1 to Grade 5, approximately, children increase in their desire to have teachers and others be more assertive to stop bullying; at Grade 6 many of them seem to have abandoned that hope, and see self-protection and avoidance as the only alternative. By Grade 8 another developmental step has been taken, and students do see intervention as potentially effective, but believe it may have to involve families, as they may be the cause and seat of the problem.

Children from kindergarten on have a concept of bullying, which becomes more inclusive and more incisive with age. Experience of bullying at school is quite widespread by Grade 4, and awareness and fear of more violent and frightening forms of youth violence outside of school is general by Grade 6. As children grow older they develop increasing insight into the motivation for bullying, the forms it can take, and the factors, including race and gender, which are related to it.

# Chapter 3

## BULLYING IN TORONTO SCHOOLS: STUDENTS', STAFF MEMBERS', AND PARENTS' EXPERIENCES, PERCEPTIONS, AND REFLECTIONS, BASED ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

One result of the classroom discussion data described above was the finding that students from Grade 4 up (and earlier) have no difficulty in understanding and applying the word or concept of bullying. Hence, the questionnaire used can be reasonably expected to elicit meaningful information. It would look to be applicable at least down to Grade 3, although our youngest subjects were in Grade 4.

Students from Grade 4 to Grade 8 filled out questionnaires modelled closely on those used in Scandinavia and England, as well as taking part in the story-telling component. Attempts were made to leave at least a day between the classwork and the administration of the questionnaire so that the students could distance themselves from the material in the classwork. This was not possible in two schools, where the questionnaire had to be given on the same day because of school time constraints.

The 211 students from 14 classes who filled out questionnaires about bullying behaviour included 106 females and 105 males, (one subject did not specify gender), distributed by age as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 year olds | — | 20 | (9%) |
| 10 year olds | — | 43 | (20%) |
| 11 year olds | — | 53 | (25%) |
| 12 year olds | — | 23 | (11%) |
| 13 year olds | — | 24 | (11%) |
| 14 year olds | — | 42 | (20%) |
| 15 year olds | — | 6 | (3%) |

147 were in Grades 4 to 6, and 57 were in Grade 8. (There were no Grade 7 classes in the sample.) Special education classes included two behavioural and two learning disabled. As noted above, schools were randomly chosen to represent each ward. (A few wards are not represented in the questionnaire data, but are included in the group data reported above.) Classrooms within schools were randomly chosen to represent Grades 4, 6, and 8.

In the tables and text below, when "teachers" are referred to, they are the classroom teachers of the 211 students surveyed, and their responses apply to their classroom and the students in it. "Other staff" includes these 14 teachers, when they are commenting on school rather than classroom matters, as well as all other teachers and the non-teaching staff in the schools.

## A. About Being Bullied

1. **How often have you/your child experienced bullying at school?**

**Table 3.1: Frequency of being bullied at school**

| | Students | Parents |
|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 51% | 63% |
| Once or twice | 28% | 15% |
| Now and then | 12% | 11% |
| Weekly or more often | 8% | 5% |
| Don't know | - | 6% |

Half the children say they are never bullied, and close to two thirds of their parents believe their children haven't experienced bullying. 40% of the children and one quarter of the parents say bullying is a problem from time to time; and about one in twelve students and one in twenty parents say they/their child is bullied at least once a week. The Norwegian report that nine percent are bullied now and then or more frequently. In our sample, we find that 20% of students, or almost one in five, (and 16% of parents) claim that they are victims of bullies more than just once or twice in a school term. This rate is much higher than the Norwegian figure of nine percent, and is almost the same as the rate of reported for British 13- and 15- year olds (23%), where the same questionnaire was used.

In two schools, no children reported being bullied more than once or twice in a term. Among the rest, the number of self-identified victims varied from one to eleven.

In our data, compared to the students, parents are aware of less bullying than is reported by their children. This is especially true of the more infrequent categories, which parents would be less likely to hear about . In fact, their estimates in the two most frequent categories are very close to those of their children.

Twenty percent of our student sample is 43 children, who are bullied more than occasionally; and eight percent represents 17 of our junior and senior elementary school sample (Grades 4-8. ages 9-14) who experience bullying on a very frequent basis(daily, in most cases). Comparable figures in Norway are nine percent and three percent. Bullying appears to affect more than twice as many children in the Toronto sample, compared to Norway.

2. **How many students in your class have been bullied at least once a week in school this term?**

**Table 3.2: Percent of children in my class often bullied**

| | Students' responses | Teachers' responses |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | 9% | 23% |
| 1-3 | 47% | 38% |
| 4-6 | 43% | 38% |

Very few children say no one is bullied. This is the main difference between students' and teachers' responses. A much larger minority of teachers than of students think no one in the

class is bullied. When responses of teachers and students in the same classrooms were compared, we found that teachers and students agreed in just over half the cases, on the number of children bullied. In the cases where their estimates differed, teachers were slightly more likely to estimate higher (more children bullied ) than lower than the students. (It should be noted that students' responses represent only two-thirds of the students, as one-third said they did not know how many children in their class were often bullied.)

### 3. In what ways are students bullied?

**Table 3.3: Kinds of bullying reported**

| | By the victims* | By all students | By staff | By parents |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teasing only | 49%** | 33% | 17% | 18%*** |
| Hitting/kicking, etc. (often including teasing) | 53% | 21% | 77% | 19% |
| Other (threats, intimidation, confinement, etc.) | 42% | 13% | 7% | 2% |

* "Victims" are defined as those 42 students, or 20% of the sample, who indicated they are bullied now and then or weekly.

** Columns do not add up to 100% because respondents could check more than one category.

*** Column does not add up to 100% because many respondents did not check any category.

While the reported rate of teasing is not extraordinarily different between victims and all other students, victims report that physical aggression is much more common than other students think, and that threats and intimidation are much more common than either other students or staff suspect. (Reports from staff on yard duty describe equal rates of verbal and physical bullying.) According to the victims, staff are under-reporting verbal taunting and threats and intimidation, and over-reporting physical aggression. This suggests that, on the one hand, it is difficult for adults to observe bullying which is audible at close range only, and is hence under-reported; but also difficult for adults to distinguish between physical play which is not unfriendly and that which is, resulting in over-reporting of physical aggression.

Parents under-report all forms of bullying, compared to children and school staff.

Children were asked another question about verbal abuse which didn't include the word "bullying." The question was, "How often do other students say nasty and unpleasant things to you?"

**Table 3.4: Frequency of verbal abuse by students**

| | |
|---|---|
| Never | 12% |
| Once in a while | 49% |
| Now and then | 15% |
| Often | 24% |

Few children, apparently, escape this kind of incivility. Teachers on yard duty reported several examples which may be typical, usually of younger children being teased by older ones. In such situations, an older child might seize the ball being played with by a group of

younger ones, refuse to return it, and call the younger children "crybabies", "dumbies," or the like when they complained.

4. **Where do children experience bullying?**

**Table 3.5: Common locations for bullying**

| | Students | Staff | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|
| Playground | 57%* | 75% | 69% |
| Hallways | 43% | 51% | 42% |
| Classrooms | 35% | 39% | 35% |
| Lunchrooms | 25% | 31% | 34% |
| Washrooms | 15% | 30% | 30% |
| On the way to school | 18% | 26% | 37% |
| On the way from school | 24% | 35% | 43% |

* Columns do not add up to 100% because respondents could check more than one category.

One of the startling results is that more children report the occurrence of bullying in closely adult-supervised settings such as classrooms, than in some unsupervised ones, like the streets surrounding the school. The playground is, according to everyone, the most common setting for bullying, but other settings, according to the students, especially hallways, come close.

5. **Who are children bullied by?**

**Table 3.6: Gender and age of bullies as reported by:**

| | Victims | Students | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|
| A boy | 28% | 19%** | 9% |
| A group of boys | 30% | 16% | 11% |
| A girl | 14% | 3% | 0% |
| A group of girls | 0% | 4% | 3% |
| Both boys and girls | 28% | 10% | 6% |
| Don't know, no response | - | - | 70% |
| In same class | 60%* | 29%** | 21%* |
| Same grade, another class | 47% | 18% | 9% |
| In an older grade | 42% | 19% | 10% |
| In a younger grade | 16% | 6% | 1% |
| Don't know, no response | - | - | 79% |

* Columns add up to more than 100% because respondents can check more than one response category.
** Column adds up to less than 100% because students who responded that they are not bullied have been excluded.

Victims describe single boys, groups of boys, and mixed groups as the source of bullying in equal proportion. Other students and parents believe girls to be less involved. Staff were asked about gender, but not number, of bullies. About twice as many reported mix gender groups as reported boys only. Very few reported girls only.

As for relative age, all parties report that children are most often bullied by peers their own age and in their own class--those with whom they spend the most time. In addition, as children are considerably more likely to be bullied by those older than by those younger, the younger children at the school are likely to be at higher risk for being bullied.

According to school staff, children most likely to be bullied are those in Grades 2 through 5, with those in Kindergarten and Grade I least likely to be bullied, and the oldest (Grades 6-8) in between.

6. **Can we identify characteristics of victims?**

Five possible correlates of victimization were investigated: gender, age, social isolation, special education status (in a self-contained classroom), and inner city neighbourhood.

a. **Gender**

Overall, the number of boys and girls reporting being bullied is essentially the same (22 in both cases, representing l9% of girls and 18% of boys). Conversely, boys and girls are equally represented among those who are never bullied, or bullied only once or twice in a term. But girls are less likely than boys to report very frequent victimization (weekly or more often). Six per cent of girls and 11% of boys report such frequent victimization. Boys are somewhat more likely to be the victims of physical aggression than girls, but the difference is not statistically significant. There are no gender differences for the other forms of bullying (verbal, intimidation, etc.)

While both genders report being bullied by boys more than girls, boys are more likely to describe being bullied by a group of boys, and girls by a boy acting alone.

b. **Age**

More young children are bullied than older ones, as in seen in Table 7.

**Table 3.7: Age of victims**

| Age in Years | Percent who are victims |
|---|---|
| 9 | 40% |
| 10 | 30% |
| 11 | 21% |
| 12 | 30% |
| 13 | 8% |
| 14 | 5% |

These figures suggest that, in the K-8 schools these students attend, few of the oldest children experience bullying, while a considerable number of the younger ones do. It should be kept in mind that 9 year olds are not the youngest in the schools, but are the youngest in our individual survey, which began in Grade 4. While the youngest children in this sample, the nine year olds, are the most often victimized, the difference in frequency of victimization among l0, 11, and 12 year

olds is minor. What stands out is the greater vulnerability of the nine year olds, and the much lesser involvement of the 13 and 14 year olds.

Younger children were more likely to report having "nasty and unpleasant" things said to them at school, as well as being bullied both verbally and physically. They are more often bullied on the playground than older children, and are also more likely than the older students to report that several children in their class have been bullied.

Olweus also reports that younger children are the most at-risk for bullying.

c. **Social Isolation**

Four questions were asked which may be seen as describing social isolation or friendlessness. Table 8 lists the responses.

**Table 3.8: Social Isolation**

| | All students | Victims |
|---|---|---|
| Having no good friends in the class | 5% | 7% |
| Often alone, unfriended at recess | 13% | 60% |
| Often lonely at school | 13% | 44% |
| Feeling less well-liked than others | 16% | 49% |

Whereas most students do not feel lonely or left out, a high percentage of the students who are bullied do describe themselves that way, on three of the four items. Approximately half of them feel themselves to be unpopular, nearly half are often lonely, and more than half feel often rejected or neglected by peers at recess time.

Gender differences are very slight. Age differences are stronger: younger children report having significantly fewer friends and being more unfriended at recess and lunchtime than older students.

d. **Special Education**

25 of the students in the sample were in self-contained Special Education classes, either for the behaviourally disturbed (18) or the learning disabled (7). When the responses of these 25 children were compared to the others in the regular classes, a significant difference was seen in victimization rates. 32% of the Special Education students, compared to 17% of the other students, report being bullied more than just once or twice.

e. **Inner City**

Schools in Toronto are ranked on an index according to characteristics of the neighbourhood as more or less "inner city." Schools with high inner city rankings are in lower income, disadvantaged areas. Eighteen percent of the students in the sample are in schools rated as highly "inner city." Victimization rates among these students were compared to those for the other students in the sample. Slightly more bullying is reported in the inner city schools. For example, 44% of children in the inner city schools, compared to 53% in the other schools, said

they had not been bullied at all. The amount of physically aggressive bullying was also slightly higher in inner city schools, where it was reported by 59% of students bullied, compared to 52% of the victims in the other schools. There was essentially no difference, however, between inner city and other schools in the percentage of children who report being bullied frequently (once a week or more often). The percentage was 8% in inner city schools and 9% in the other schools.

## 7. Who intervenes to protect children?

### a. Self-initiated interventions (calls for help)

Do children go to adults for help when they are being bullied? 53% of those who were bullied say they told their teacher about it. 36% told their parent(s). This suggests that a most parents and a sizable minority of teachers may be unaware that a child is being bullied. Most children who were bullied told either their parent or their teacher; but 28% told neither. Olweus's data led him to conclude that "Parents of students who are bullied and, in particular, who bully others, are relatively unaware of the problem and talk with their children about it only to a limited extent." (Olweus, 1987, p.403)

One third of the teachers report that three or more of their students have talked to them about being bullied, and 40% said that one or two had done so. Only 10% said no students have talked to them about it. It may be that many teachers assume that they hear about most of the bullying that occurs, because they do hear of it from some students. But if the children who say they are bullied with some frequency are reporting accurately, teachers do not hear from almost half of them.

Other staff members also reported on the number of students in the school who spoke to them about being bullied. 14% said no child had spoken to them about it. 49% said five or fewer had done so, and 25% said more than five had. It appears that teachers and other staff members are often approached by students who have been bullied, even though many of the most victimized do not report it.

### b. Intervention by peers

How often do other students try to stop bullying when it is going on at school, and how often does someone (most probably a peer) intervene on the way to and from school?

**Table 3.9: Frequency of peer intervention in bullying**

| | At school | | To and from school | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Students | Staff | Students | Staff |
| Almost never | 31% | 13% | 27% | 1% |
| Occasionally | 14% | 7% | 13% | 6% |
| Frequently | 25% | 9% | 6% | 13% |
| Don't know | 30% | 59% | 54% | 62% |

30% of the students say that peers do try to stop bullying incidents at school at least occasionally, and 25% say this happens frequently. Outside of school, intervention is much rarer--perhaps simply because fewer children are around to witness the event and to intervene.

Children were asked how they personally respond to bullying.

**Table 3.10: Children's response to bullying**

| | |
|---|---|
| What I do | |
| Nothing; not my business | 24% |
| Nothing; but I should | 33% |
| I try to help | 43% |
| What I feel | |
| I don't feel much | 10% |
| It's somewhat unpleasant | 29% |
| It's very unpleasant | 61% |

These responses suggest that most children feel distressed by bullying and are willing, although not always able, to help. One in ten children appears to be indifferent to other children's distress; the rest are not; and three in four would like to help.

## c. Intervention by adults

### 1. Direct intervention

Children and their classroom teachers were asked how often teachers try to intervene in bullying to stop it. They responded as follows:

**Table 3.11: Frequency of intervention by teachers**

| | According to students | According to teachers |
|---|---|---|
| Almost never | 30% | 8% |
| Occasionally | 31% | 8% |
| Often/almost always | 39% | 85% |

Students divide into three nearly equal groups, with about one-third saying teachers never, occasionally, and usually intervene. (This omits students who said "don't know.) Almost all teachers, however, think that teachers usually intervene. The gap between students' and teachers'perceptions is especially large here. It is possible that teachers rarely fail to intervene in bullying when they see it, and that children are aware of many incidents of bullying in which teachers do not intervene because they are unaware that it is occurring.

In 13 schools where staff on yard duty kept track of bullying incidents they witnessed during recess and before and after school over one week, the number of incidents reported per yard duty varied from zero to nine, with zero being reported in the majority of cases. Staff members said they intervened in almost all cases, and that students intervened in very few instances. Given the amount of bullying that both students and staff agree is occurring, it seems unlikely that the "zero" report is accurate in all cases.

The Norwegian data are similar to ours: 40-60% of children said teachers intervened never or only occasionally. Olweus concluded that teachers do relatively little to stop bullying at school, based on reports of both bullies and victims.

2. **Later intervention (follow-up)**

Children were asked if teachers or parents talked to them about being bullied at school. Of those who said they experienced bullying, 49% said their teacher(s) talked to them about it, and 44% said their parents did. Again, about half the victims either were not known as such by their teachers or parents, as is suggested above, or else these adults did not choose to talk to the children about the incident. 30% of those victimized said that neither their teacher nor their parent had talked to them about it.

## B. About Bullying

1. **How many/what proportion of children identify themselves or others in their class as bullies? What is the relationship of gender and age to bullying?**

61% of the children surveyed said they have not bullied other students at all at school in the present term. Another 24% say they have done so only once or twice. The remaining 15% (32) of students admit to more frequent bullying. This figure, like those reported for victims, is more than twice as high as the Norwegian one. In Norway, seven percent (compared to our 15%) admit to more than occasional bullying.

Only two percent admit to a very high frequency of bullying (once a week or more). This is about the same as the Norwegian rate. There are strong indications in the Toronto data, however, that this figure may be an underestimate: when asked whether they have bullied anyone in the last five school days, one quarter of all students and one third of the self-reported bullies acknowledge that they have done so.

Overall, the highest percentage of self-identified bullies is among the 11 and 12 year olds. None of the nine year olds and very few of the ten year olds identifies her/himself as a bully. Among the 13 and 14 year olds, the percentage drops overall from over 20% to under 10%; but the pattern is different for boys and girls.

Two thirds of all the bullies are boys. The boys who self-identify as bullies are one-quarter of all the boys in the sample, while the girls who self-identify as bullies are only 9% of all the girls in the sample. No girls over the age of 12 identify themselves as bullies; but among boys, the rate of self-reported bullying, although highest at age 11, does not decrease steadily after that, and is in fact higher at age 14 than at 12 or 13. These data resemble but do not duplicate those from Scandinavia, where Olweus found, as we did, that bullying by girls decreases with age, whereas for boys it increases with age. In Toronto, the male rate could best be described as decreasing after age 11, but without a very clear trend line.

In two schools, no children identify themselves as bullies. Among the rest, the range is from half a percent to over four percent.

Most children--88%-- say they have done no bullying on the way to and from school. 9% say they have done so once or twice, and 4% say they have done so with some frequency.

8% of parents said their child had taken part in bullying other students at school during the term, and 4% said their child had done this on the way to and from school.

When asked how many in the class have been involved as bullies (including themself), students and teachers report:

**Table 3.12: Number of students in my class who've been bullies**

| | According to students | According to teachers |
|---|---|---|
| 0 students | 16% | 27% |
| 1 or 2 students | 14% | 33% |
| 3 or 4 students | 19% | 7% |
| 5 or 6 students | 7% | 13% |
| 7 or more students | 14% | 13% |
| I don't know | 30% | 7% |

A majority of students say there is at least one person who has been a bully in their class. If we use 30 as a typical class size, in Grades 4 to 8, then 40% of students and 33% of teachers say that at least one in every ten students in their class has been involved as a bully in the present term, suggesting that the self-report rate of 15% is not an underestimate.

When all school staff are asked how many students in the school have been bullies in the current term, 29% say five or fewer and 28% say six or more. Only 7% say none.

Students and teachers were also asked about those who bully other students frequently. The number of students who identify themselves as having bullied others at least once a week during the term is only 1% (2 students). But about half the teachers say that they have students who have bullied others at least once a week. 43% of school staff members say there are children in the school who have bullied others in the last week, and almost one third say there are six or more children who have done so. These figures suggest that children may be willing to acknowledge that they bully others, but unwilling to admit that they do it very frequently. Perhaps children feel that occasional bullying is not a character flaw, but being a bully is an unacceptable identity to have.

2. **Is race a factor in school bullying?**

42% of students and 39% of their classroom teachers said that race-related bullying occurs in their school. Students were also asked how often this occurs.

**Table 3.13: Frequency of race-related bullying according to students**

| | |
|---|---|
| Not at all | 54% |
| Once in a while | 12% |
| Now and then | 11% |
| Often | 12% |
| Don't know | 10% |

One in eight students says this happens often in their school--one in four in inner city schools.

3. **How do you feel about bullying?**

Students were asked whether they think they could join in bullying a student they don't like. One third agreed that they could; another third said they couldn't; and the remaining third was unsure. Boys were significantly more likely than girls to agree that they could do so. (46 boys, compared to 24 girls, said they could.)

They were also asked if they think it is "fun to make trouble for other students." Almost three quarters said no. Most of the remaining quarter said "once in a while", but 6% said it was fun to do so on a more regular basis. Boys were significantly more likely to say this than girls. (12 boys, compared to one girl, said it was frequently fun to make trouble for other students.)

Asked what they think of students who are bullies, one-third said it was upsetting or hard to understand; one-third didn't know what to think; and another third said they could understand why students do it.

4. **Why do students bully their peers?**

Students, staff members, and parents were asked what they think the bullies' motives are. Four options were offered to the adults, and a fifth to the students (the "cool" alternative).

**Table 3.14: Why do students bully?**

| | Bullies | All students | Staff | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jealousy | 31%* | 48% | 42% | 57% |
| Want attention | 31% | 55% | 69% | 60% |
| To feel powerful | 59% | 68% | 75% | 73% |
| Low self-esteem | 13% | 17% | 55% | 42% |
| To be "cool" | 56% | 65% | - | - |
| Other | 22% | 14% | 17% | 15% |

* Columns add up to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer.

The reason for bullying most endorsed by both adults and children, including the self-identified bullies, is the desire to feel powerful, followed by a desire for attention. (The "cool" reason comes between the other two in popularity for the children. "Cool" is presumably a word that implies both popular and powerful.) The main difference between children and adults in the motives they ascribe to bullying is that children do not see bullies as people with low self-esteem, while adults tend to do so. (Some Grade 8 students take this more adult-like perspective; see Part I, above.)

5. **What is/should be done about bullying, to stop it happening?**

Students were asked whether their teacher and/or their parent had talked to them about bullying other students. 43% of the children who are involved in more than isolated cases of bullying said their teachers had spoken to them about it, and 63% said their parent()s had spoken to them. It is somewhat surprising that parents should be more aware that their children have bullied others than teachers are, as one would not expect children to tell their parents about such behaviour, and one assumes parents would have less opportunity to observe it, unless in fact the same children who bully others at school bully siblings and neighbourhood children as well, and parents see it or have it reported to them by victims' parents.

When asked what they think should happen, the following behaviours were specified by students, school staff members, and parents:

**Table 3.15: What students should do if bullied**

| | Bullies | Victims | Students | Staff | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tell parents | 50%* | 77% | 61% | 75% | 85% |
| Tell teachers | 51% | 73% | 60% | 88% | 86% |
| Tell friends | 31% | 41% | 38% | 35% | 27% |
| Talk to bully | 21% | 32% | 24% | 39% | 29% |
| Fight back | 46% | 30% | 26% | 10% | 14% |
| Do nothing | 15% | 25% | 9% | 2% | 1% |
| Other | 10% | 18% | 12% | 9% | 9% |
| I don't know | 3% | 5% | 1% | 1% | 2% |

* Columns add up to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer.

It is clear that children feel that they should be looking mainly to adults, not peers or self, for help when bullying occurs. This position is clearly also that of staff and parents, who endorse it even more strongly than the children do. A significant difference between bullies and other children is that bullies are more likely to suggest that fighting back is an appropriate response to bullying. Whereas only one-quarter of all students endorse this, it is a strategy recommended by almost half the bullies.

**Table 3.16: What can teachers do to help?**

| | Students | Staff | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|
| Talk to the students | 67% | 85% | 89% |
| Break up fights | 49% | 53% | 51% |
| Punish bullies | 50% | 46% | 55% |
| Get bully and victim to talk to each other | 48% | 72% | - |
| Nothing | 6% | 0% | 0% |
| Other | 2% | 11% | 23% |

**Table 3.17: What can parents do to help?**

| | Students | Staff |
|---|---|---|
| Talk to their child about it | 66% | 89% |
| Talk to teacher or principal | 67% | 79% |
| Other | 14% | 13% |
| I don't know | 1% | 2% |

All parties agree that the main thing teachers can do to help is to talk to the students involved. The only significant difference of opinion between students and staff (parents weren't queried on this option) is on whether it is useful for a teacher to get the bully and victim to talk to each other. Students are less likely than staff to see this as helpful. In their comments, students indicated another alternative for parents: several felt that parents of victims should talk to the parents of the bullies involved, on behalf of their children, and in an attempt to discourage more bullying.

Children's notions about adult intervention appear to be that teachers and parents can be effective by talking to bullies and by talking to each other (and principals). One of the suggestions given by several children was that parents of victims should talk to parents of bullies.In fact, although only 8% of parents said they were aware their child had bullied others, 20% said they had talked to their child about bullying others. For staff members the numbers are the reverse: 19% had not spoken to any students about bullying, although only 8% had said they were unaware of any bullying. However, most staff members (71%) had spoken to children about bullying behaviour.

6. **Can we identify characteristics of bullies?**

   a. **Gender**

      As described above, significantly more boys than girls say they have bullied other students. More boys than girls also indicated the could imagine doing so, and that it could be fun to do so. More boys than girls say they have bullied their teacher. Boys are more likely than girls to suggest fighting back or doing nothing as ways of responding to bullies. In Olweus's Bergen study, he reported that 60% of the girls and 80% of the boys were bullied by boys, not girls.

   b. **Age**

      As described above, the youngest and oldest children in this sample are least likely to be bullies. Most of the bullies are in the eleven to twelve year old range. Other variables show a correlation with age, with the children at the younger end of the age range showing a lower likelihood of being involved in or sympathetic to bullying. For example: younger children are less likely than older ones to say they could imagine joining in bullying someone they don't like. They are also more likely to find bullying very upsetting.

   c. **Special Education**

      While it is rarer for children in Special Education classes to say they have never bullied another student, the Special Education students are not more likely than other students to be among the frequent bullies. Differences in bullying rates between Special Education and regular program students are not significant.

   d. **Inner City**

      A somewhat higher percentage of inner city students said they had never bullied another student than was true of non-inner city students. The respective proportions were 67%, inner city, and 59%, other schools. This result appears to conflict with the finding, reported above, that more students report being bullied in inner city schools.

7. **School-home communication about bullying**

   Parents were asked whether their child's teacher or counsellor has talked with them about their child being bullied , and whether they themselves have talked to school personnel about this. They were also asked from whom else (if anyone) they heard their child was being bullied.

The students' classroom teachers were also asked how many parents they had spoken to about their child being bullied at school, and how many parents had spoken to them about it.

**Table 3.18: School-home communication**

| | Teachers | Parents |
|---|---|---|
| Staff initiated communication | 58% | 9% |
| Parents initiated communication | 67% | 6% |

It is quite possible that the numbers in Table 18 are accurate and not contradictory. Since the bullies and the victims may be expected to be spread across many or most of the classes surveyed, it is not surprising that a majority of teachers would have been involved in discussion with parents about the problem. But, since the total number of children frequently involved in bullying, as victims or aggressors, is between 8% and 20%, depending on how "frequent" is defined, it is understandable that the percentage of parents who would have received or initiated communication is low --although, given the 20% figure, it is perhaps lower than one might expect.

In fact, in answer to how they heard their child had been bullied, by far the most common source named was the child her/himself.

**Table 3.19: How I heard my child was being bullied at school**

| | |
|---|---|
| From my child | 28% |
| From the principal/vice-principal | 1% |
| From the teacher | 3% |
| From other children | 5% |
| Other | 1% |

One quarter of teachers said they had not spoken to any parents about it; half said they had spoken to one or two parents; and one quarter said they had spoken to three or more parents. Given that half the teachers reported that four or more children in their class had experienced bullying, the number of parents contacted seems low.

This is true for parents as well. One quarter of teachers reported that no parents have spoken to them; 70% said one or two have; and only 5% said three or more parents spoke to them about their child being bullied at school.

According to 90% of the classroom teachers of these students, no parent had talked to them about their child bullying other students.

## Summary

1. Half the students say they are never bullied; more than a quarter say it happens only once or twice in a terms. The remaining fifth are the students identified in this report as victims. One in five children reports that s/he is bullied at school more than once or twice in a term; eight per cent report they are bullied once a weekly or daily, all term long.

   Children in self-contained Special Education classes report being bullied more than other children.

   Students and teachers agree that several children in their classes are bullied frequently. Very few students (and about one quarter of teachers) say that no one in their class is bullied frequently.

2. Most students think physical aggression is less common than verbal aggression; the victims think the two kinds are about equally common; and teachers think physical aggression is a much larger component in bullying than students do. A much higher proportion of students in inner city schools report that physically aggressive bullying occurs at their school. One kind of bullying which teachers and most students are not very aware of, but which many victims report, is of the threatening and intimidating variety.

3. While everyone agrees that the playground is the most common school venue for bullying, hallways and classrooms are named by a third to a half of students, teachers, and parents as places where it also occurs. Adults are more likely than children to believe bullying occurs in washrooms, and on the way to and from school.

4. Boys and girls are equally likely to be bullied, although boys are more likely to be frequently bullied. Children who are bullied report that one or more boys or boys and girls together are equally likely to be bullies, not girls acting alone or with each other. School staff agree, but are much more likely to see mixed gender groups than boys only as being the culprits.

5. Most of the 11 and 12 year old children who are victims are most often bullied by peers in the same class, rather than in other classes, and by children in the same grade, rather than other grades. But young children are the most likely to be bullied. (In this sample, the youngest children are 9 years old.)The oldest students (the 13 and 14 year olds) are rarely bullied.

6. About half the students say they tell their teachers and/or parents when they are bullied, but many who are frequently victimized do not seek adult help. Teachers report that many students come to them for help, but this apparently does not include many of those at highest risk. About three quarters of teachers say they usually intervene if they see bullying going on; only one quarter of students perceive that teachers typically do so.

7. Many students and some staff say that children do intervene to stop bullying. Most students find bullying very unpleasant, and either do try to help or would like to be able to do so. About one quarter don't want to be involved in intervening, and about 10% don't find it distressing.

8. Four in ten students admit to doing some bullying from time to time, including during the previous school week. 15%, or about one in seven, says they have done so more than once or twice in a term. Only 2% say they bully other children every week, or more often, but the reports for the previous week from both students and staff suggest this is a significant underestimate. It may be that students feel more comfortable describing themselves as occasionally aggressive than they do with the self-definition of "bully." If so, an important part of a whole school intervention would be a redefinition and broadening of the term "bully" to include those who do it only occasionally.

9. Many more boys than girls identify themselves as bullies (25%, compared to 9%).

10. 11 and 12 year-olds do more bullying than younger and older children, in our sample. The younger children are very little involved, as bullies. Among the older children (the 13 and 14 year olds), girls are not involved; boys continue to be.

11. A large minority of students and teachers identified race as a factor in bullying. Most who say it is a factor say it is so only occasionally, not frequently.

12. The most common reason for bullying, according to the bullies themselves, the rest of the children and the adults, both parents and staff, is the desire to feel powerful.

13. Children and adults agree that the best thing a student can do about being bullied is to tell a parent and/or teacher. Fighting back is not a popular alternative among most respondents. More boys than girls endorse it, as do more bullies than other children.

    There is also general agreement that the best thing adults can do is talk to the students involved, and make sure that parents and staff both know what is going on. Parents most often hear about bullying from the children. While there is considerable communication between home and school about bullying, there is some indication that more may be needed.

## CONCLUSION

The general findings in Toronto are very similar in kind to those in Scandinavia, where the same data-collection instruments were used; but the findings are quite different in scale. Similarities in kind include the findings that, for example, boys are more involved than girls; young children are more victimized than older ones; and bullying is more common at school than elsewhere. As well, in both national locales, many teachers and parents are unaware of individual children's involvement; and children perceive that teachers frequently overlook bullying.

But the number of students involved in bullying here appears to be much higher than in Scandinavia. This higher rate--one in three compared to one in seven--is similar to figures coming out of British studies.

There is little doubt, based on this random sampling in elementary schools, that bullying affects the lives of thousands of school children in Toronto. If one in twelve children experiences bullying on a near-daily basis, the number affected is about 2200, in Grades 4 to 8 alone.

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